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## LAND GRANTS FOR INTERNAL IMPROVEMENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Every student of American economic history realizes the fact that economic development has been conditioned largely by the creation of artificial transportation routes—wagon roads, canals, and railroads. That the public aid offered to transportation enterprises assumed the form of vast grants from the public lands is also a fact familiar to everyone. Until recently, however, there has been no accessible information respecting the exact amount of land thus granted and actually patented. We now possess, in a report of the Public Land Office of 1908,<sup>1</sup> an adequate account of this important subject.

Prior to 1841 grants had been made from time to time for wagon roads, canals, river improvements, and other internal developments. Railroads benefited largely from the granting of rights of way. On September 4, 1841, the State Selection Act provided that "to each state named and to each new state that shall hereafter be admitted into the Union," 500,000 acres of public lands shall be given for internal improvements. This included the quantity granted to each state for this purpose before its admission. Practically all of this land has been patented: 90,000 acres went to Alabama; 209,000 to Illinois; 500,000 each to Missouri, Mississippi, Louisiana, Michigan, Arkansas, Florida, Iowa, Wisconsin, California, Kansas, Minnesota, Oregon, Nevada, Nebraska, and Colorado—total, 7,807,000 acres.<sup>2</sup>

The earliest land grants to aid internal improvements went to wagon roads as depicted in Table I.<sup>3</sup>

Two periods can be distinguished: the first, from 1823 to 1827, during which Ohio and Indiana reaped the benefits; the

<sup>1</sup> *Statement Showing Land Grants Made by Congress to Aid in the Construction of Railroads, Wagon Roads, Canals, and Internal Improvements, Together with Data Relative Thereto* (compiled from the Records of the General Land Office), Washington, Government Printing Office, 1908, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Donaldson, *The Public Domain*, 255.

<sup>3</sup> *Land Office Statement* (1908), 22-23.

second, from 1863 to 1869, when Michigan, Wisconsin, and Oregon received their dote. Nearly all of the grants have been patented, Oregon alone failing to acquire all possible.

TABLE I

Date	Grantee	Area Granted	Patented June 30, 1907	Patented June 30, 1909
1823-27.....	Ohio	80,774.54	80,773.54	.....
1827.....	Indiana	170,580.24	170,580.24	.....
1863-64.....	Michigan	221,013.35	221,013.35	.....
1863-64.....	Wisconsin	302,930.96	302,930.96	.....
1864, 1866, 1867, 1869.....	Oregon	2,453,932.32	2,169,964.20	.....
Total.....	.....	3,229,231.41	2,945,262.29	2,962,963.96*

\* Report of Department of Interior (1909), I, 91.

The wagon-road grants were soon followed by concessions to aid in the construction of canals. Table II gives the details of the different grants to states.<sup>4</sup>

TABLE II

Date	State	Area Granted	Patented June 30, 1907	Purpose
1827, 1830, 1841, 1842, 1845, 1848.	Indiana	1,480,409	all	Wabash and Erie
1827.....	Ohio	1,204,114	all	Wabash and Miami
1863-64.....	Illinois	324,283	all	Illinois River and Lake Michigan
1863-64.....	Wisconsin	338,627	all	Rock River and Green Bay Ship Canal
1864, 1867, 1869...	Michigan	1,250,236	all	St. Mary's Ship Canal
Total.....	.....	4,597,669	4,597,669	

The same two periods are in evidence, but Indiana continued to receive grants on into the forties. All of these canal grants have been patented, if for no other reason, to reduce the financial obligations which these relatively useless improvements imposed on the several governments. At the present time these canals, with the exception of the St. Mary's Ship Canal and the Green Bay Ship Canal, are practically useless and abandoned.

<sup>4</sup> Land Office Statement (1908), 24-25.

Even river improvements received encouragement by a donation from the expanse of land to be disposed of. The following figures in Table III show that these grants, however, were less important.<sup>5</sup>

TABLE III

Date	State	Grant	Patented June 30, 1907
1828 .....	Alabama	400,016	all
1846, 1854, 1865 .....	Wisconsin	683,722	all
1846, 1862 .....	Iowa	1,161,514	all
Total .....		2,245,252	

As with canal grants, full advantage was taken of congressional aid thus proffered.

In the early grants for internal improvements prior to 1850 we see the beginning of a movement which culminated in the wholesale grant of lands to railroads from 1850 to 1871. Before 1850, while rights of way and other support had been granted, Congress had not yet adopted the policy of giving such favorable treatment of transportation facilities. There is no record of the granting of pre-emption rights to a railroad before 1850.<sup>6</sup> That to the Illinois Central was the first important donation of land, but was followed by a series of grants which went on till 1871, interrupted only by the panic of 1857 and the Civil War. Table IV gives figures showing the number of acts, sections per mile to grantee, the number of corporations, the grantees of the states, the area of the grant and the area patented, with mileage of the road, the number of miles completed after the time prescribed, and the number of miles uncompleted September 29, 1892.<sup>7</sup>

During the first period from 1850 to 1857 the grants were usually six sections per mile of line. Many of these grants were increased during the period 1862-71, when the tendency to grant larger areas prevailed. This first period was one of great

<sup>5</sup> *Land Office Statement* (1908), 26-27.

<sup>6</sup> Haney, *Congressional History of Railways*, University of Wisconsin Studies, Economics and Political Science Series, III, 346.

<sup>7</sup> *Land Office Statement* (1908), 1-23.

railroad development, which culminated in the financial panic of 1857. Owing to the opposition of the southerners all grants were made first to the states, and by them to the corporations.

TABLE IV  
FEDERAL LAND GRANTS, 1850-57; 1862-71

Year	Number of Acts	Sections per mile	Granted	Number of Corporations	Area of Grant	Patented by June 30, 1907	Miles of Road	Miles Completed after Time Presented	Miles Uncompleted September 29, 1890	Patented June 30, 1909
1850...	1	6	Illinois, Mississippi, Alabama	2	3,751,791	3,751,791	1,201	0	0	
1852...	1	6	Missouri	2	1,937,630	1,772,608	447	0	0	
1853...	1	6*	Arkansas	3	4,336,979	2,627,056	691	0	0	
1856...	4	6†	Iowa, Florida, Alabama, Michigan, Wisconsin, Louisiana	31	14,691,761	11,929,401	4,916	661	502	
1857...	1	6‡	Mississippi, Minnesota	5	7,364,269	6,325,437	1,424	232	89	
Total					32,082,430	26,406,293	8,679	893	591	
1862...	1	10	Companies	4	15,458,399	12,854,255	1,469	0	0	
1863...	1	10	Kansas	3	4,492,826	4,170,827	948	0	0	
1864...	3	10-20¶	Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and Companies	6	67,615,631	49,375,292	5,160	544	1,592	
1868...	1	4 added	Michigan	1	680,033	518,065	125	0	0	
1866...	4	5-10¶	Minnesota, Kansas, Wisconsin, and Companies	7	30,768,700	13,176,718	4,356	1,443	1,788	
1870...	1	20-40	Companies	1	397,602	128,618	144	0	97	
1871...	1	40	Companies	2	6,791,005	2,259,455	607	260	0	
Total					126,204,196	82,483,230	12,809	2,247	3,477	
Grand Total					158,286,626	108,889,523	21,488	3,140	4,068	113,388,634§

\* Changed in 1864 to odd sections within 6 miles of the railroad.

† Special cases of enlargement in later period.

‡ In every case raised to 40 in 1864-66.

¶ 5 in Minnesota, 10 and 20 in other states, and 40 in territories.

§ Report of Department of Interior (1909), I, 93.

A larger part of these grants have been patented. In the second period the restraining influence of the South was lacking. As a result we see much larger grants and many of these direct to the companies. This period was marked by the growth of granger and transcontinental railroads. That much of the land

was of low value partly explains the seeming liberality of Congress. However, a smaller proportion of this land has been patented. Altogether 158,286,627 acres were granted; only 113,912,455 acres were patented by 1909.

Table V gives the number of acres granted and patented, in each period.<sup>8</sup>

TABLE V  
GRANTS BY STATES, 1850-57; 1862-71

State	Years	Area of Grant	Patented up to 1907	Miles	Patented up to June 30, 1909
Illinois . . . . .	1850	2,595,133	2,595,133	707	
Mississippi . . . . .	1850-56	1,285,743	1,075,345	777	
Missouri . . . . .	1852-53	2,438,015	1,837,728	842	
Alabama . . . . .	1852-53, 1856	3,193,710	2,746,320	1,083	
Arkansas . . . . .	1852-53	3,836,595	2,561,935	297	
Iowa . . . . .	1856	4,507,531	3,441,038	1,209	
Florida . . . . .	1856	2,497,710	2,196,926	678	
Michigan . . . . .	1856	3,103,880	2,615,122	1,236	
Wisconsin . . . . .	1856	560,605	547,562	155	
Louisiana . . . . .	1856	699,221	463,747	270	
Minnesota . . . . .	1857	7,364,269	6,325,437	1,424	
Total . . . . .		32,082,430	26,406,293	8,678	
Kansas . . . . .	1863, 1866	5,843,207	4,633,761	1,173	
Wisconsin . . . . .	1864	3,789,174	3,103,303	840	
Minnesota . . . . .	1864, 1866	3,756,624	1,696,267	635	
Iowa . . . . .	1864	1,564,588	648,629	334	
Michigan . . . . .	1864	680,033	518,065	125	37,885,678*
Total . . . . .	1862-71	15,633,626	10,600,025	3,107	
To Companies . . . . .	1862-71	110,570,570	71,883,205	9,702	75,502,956
Total . . . . .	1862-71	126,204,196	82,483,230	12,802	
Grand Total . . . . .	1850-71	158,286,626	108,889,523	21,488	113,388,634

\*Report of Department of Interior (1909), I, 90-93.

As has been pointed out grants were made only indirectly in the period 1850-57. And while there was a great expansion of the number of acres granted in the later period, only half as many passed through the hands of the state governments. Of the 126,204,196 acres granted in the second

\* Land Office Statement (1908), 1-23.

period only 15,633,626 were granted first to the states. The companies received the great proportion directly as follows:<sup>9</sup>

TABLE VI

Date	Road	Area Granted	Area Patented up to June 30, 1907	Miles	Patented June 30, 1909
1862, 1864..	Union Pacific. . . . .	12,119,672	11,323,344	1,039	11,930,566
1862, 1864..	(U.P.) Denver Pacific	1,129,300	807,072	106	807,565
1862, 1864..	(U.P.) Kansas Pacific	7,776,238	6,175,621	639	6,175,661
1862, 1864..	(U.P.) Central Br. of Union Pacific	261,842	223,081	100	223,081
1862. . . . .	(U.P.) Sioux City & Pacific	597,826	42,611	102	42,611
1862, 1864..	C.P. (Western). . . . .	1,349,758	458,148	123	458,148
1862, 1864..	Central Pacific	8,029,383	5,740,235	738	5,740,235
1866. . . . .	(C.P.) California & Oregon	3,266,729	3,154,794	304	3,154,868
1864. . . . .	(C.B. & Q.) Burling- ton & Missouri Riv- er	2,361,984	2,374,091	191	2,374,091
1864. . . . .	Northern Pacific. . . .	43,159,428	30,472,439	2,263	32,282,517
1866. . . . .	Oregon Central	3,821,902	2,765,677	360	2,265,677
1870. . . . .	Oregon Central. . . . .	397,602	128,618	145	128,618
1866. . . . .	(S.F.) Atlantic & Pac- ific	14,539,805	2,744,790	2,429	4,181,608
1866. . . . .	Atlantic & Pacific	4,968,096	3,213,229	556	3,478,136
1871. . . . .	Atlantic & Pacific. . .	4,044,051	1,258,438	347	1,258,557
1871. . . . .	(N.O.P.) N.O.B., R. & V.	2,746,954	1,001,017	260	1,001,017
Total. . . .		110,570,570	71,883,205	9,702	75,502,956

The Northern Pacific, running as it does through much unpromising territory, received by far the largest direct grant, amounting to over one-third of the total. The Union Pacific, or lines which have since amalgamated with it, comes next in the list with less than half as much. What is now a part of the Sante Fé system, the old Atlantic & Pacific, received the next largest share. Only one railroad receiving aid was situated in the South. A considerable amount of these grants remained unpatented in 1909. The areas granted to and patented by states for railroads are given in Table VII.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* (1908), 1-23

The amounts patented by states and companies down to date are given in the *Report of the Department of the Interior* annually.

TABLE VII

State	Year	Area Granted	Patented 1907	1909*
Illinois.....	1850	2,595,133	2,595,133	2,595,133
Mississippi.....	1850, 1856	1,285,743	1,075,345	1,075,345
Missouri.....	1852, 1853	2,438,015	1,837,728	1,837,728
Alabama.....	1852, 1853, 1856	3,193,719	2,746,320	2,746,400
Arkansas.....	1852, 1853	3,836,595	2,561,935	2,562,015
Iowa.....	1856, 1864.	6,072,119	4,089,667	4,929,758
Florida.....	1856	2,497,719	2,196,926	2,197,006
Michigan.....	1856, 1864	3,783,913	3,133,187	3,133,176
Wisconsin.....	1856, 1864	4,349,779	3,650,865	3,649,749
Louisiana.....	1856	699,221	463,747	463,747
Kansas.....	1863-66	5,843,207	4,633,761	4,633,761
Minnesota.....	1857, 1864, 1866	11,120,893	8,021,704	8,061,860
Total.....		47,716,056	37,006,318	37,885,678*

\* *Land Office Statement* (1908), 1-23.

By far the largest grant was made to Minnesota, Iowa receiving only a little more than half as much. In general the southern states received much less than the western states. Moreover, grants to companies aided development in these western states and territories. Illinois alone patented all her grants. Altogether about one-fifth of the grants to the states still remains unpatented.

To summarize the condition of railroad land grants the following table is derived from the foregoing statistics:

TABLE VIII

	Area Granted	Patented 1907	1909
To states 1850-57.....	32,082,430	26,406,293	
To states 1860-71.....	15,633,626	10,600,025	37,885,678
To companies.....	110,570,570	71,883,205	75,502,956
Total.....	158,286,626	108,889,523	113,388,634

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